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FOR EUR/WE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH SPAIN OF U.S. SHIP VISITS TO
GIBRALTAR

Classified By: Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission Hugo Llorens, Reas
ons 1.4(b),(d).

¶1. (U) On June 17, 2008, Embassy and GOS officials met in the context of the U.S.-Spain Permanent Committee (this is the standing committee that manages the bilateral agreement on defense cooperation) to discuss the issue of U.S. ship visits to Gibraltar. This meeting was prompted by recent and repeated Spanish expressions of concern about such visits and questions regarding their operational necessity. On the U.S. side the meeting included the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation Commander (President of the U.S. Section of the Permanent Committee), the Political Counselor (Vice President of the U.S. Section), and the current and incoming U.S. Defense Attaches. Spanish attendees included RADM Teodoro Lopez Calderon (President of the Spanish Section), Ambassador Santiago de Mora Figueroa y Williams (VP of the Spanish Section), MFA Deputy Director General for North America Fernando Prieto, and head of the MFA's Gibraltar office Jorge Domecq.

¶2. (C) We explained that U.S. policy regarding ship visits to Gibraltar had not changed. The U.S. was very appreciative of Spanish defense cooperation and particularly the facilities Rota offered our ships. This was amply reflected in the fact that our ships visited Spanish ports far more often than Gibraltar. Nevertheless, operational considerations sometimes made Gibraltar the more logical choice. The U.S. Assistant Naval Attache briefed exhaustively on these operational considerations (while noting that the Embassy Madrid DAO was accredited to Spain, not the UK, therefore was not involved in arranging ship visits to Gibraltar). He emphasized our strict adherence to Spain's reservations in STANAG 1100 regarding travel directly between Spain and Gibraltar (which implicitly constitutes a recognition that NATO country vessels will visit Gibraltar). He pointed out that Gibraltar offered streamlined procedures for obtaining permission to visit as well as having a type of intermediate fuel oil unavailable in Rota but used by some of our ships. He said obtaining permission for contractor access was less cumbersome in Gibraltar, and the depth of the harbor at Rota was inadequate for some U.S. vessels. Finally, he explained that force protection requirements involved in transiting the Straits of Gibraltar sometimes made it undesirable to leave the Mediterranean to reach Rota, despite the short distance between Gibraltar and Rota. He pointed out that regardless of all these factors, as between Gibraltar and Spain, 93 percent of our ship visits went to Spanish ports (for example, thus far in 2008 there have been 80 U.S. ship visits to Spanish ports and eight to Gibraltar).

13. (C) The briefing was designed to offer the Spanish MFA (which seems to get more exercised about the Gibraltar issue than the Spanish Navy) the opportunity to explore our operational reasons for visiting Gibraltar, but there were few questions from the Spanish side. The MFA representatives asked a few points of clarification regarding the numbers of ship visits and the availability of fuel oil. Lopez Calderon went so far as to acknowledge that while the other operational factors might involve some element of choice, the availability of the needed type of fuel oil and the depth of the harbor did not. Where those factors came into play, Rota was not an option. However, he did point out that a project would soon be underway to dredge the harbor at Rota (Note: we understand the tentative completion date to be 2010. End note.)

14. (C) Contacts at the British Embassy often share their frustration with the Spanish over this issue. The British Ambassador recently told Ambassador Aguirre that the Spanish seemed to be tightening the screws on them, enforcing more strictly rules regarding the overland passage of items which could be considered "dual use" for civilian and military purposes. We also understand the Spanish have pressured other NATO allies (among them Germany and the Netherlands) not to send their ships to Gibraltar.

15. (C) Comment: This is not our first conversation with the Spanish about ship visits to Gibraltar and it will not be the last. The Spanish will never be comfortable with U.S. ship visits there and will continue to complain from time to time. They are particularly sensitive to submarines because of the

nuclear issue and because of a long-running saga in 2000-2001 when a Royal Navy nuclear submarine (HMS Tireless) broke down in Gibraltar and stayed there for months while environmental groups beat the drum about the alleged danger of a nuclear accident. Nevertheless, the Spanish have hinted that they do not want this to become a major irritant in an otherwise excellent bilateral military-to-military relationship. Our approach whenever this comes up will continue to be to express gratitude for access to Spanish ports, sensitivity to Spanish concerns, and no flexibility whatsoever on the issue of our right to visit Gibraltar.

AGUIRRE